

The ancient best sellers in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* cannot fail to engage modern readers. This is a fascinating collection of rare social documents revealing the hopes, dreams, anxieties, daily life, moral values, and popular beliefs of individuals of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Deward E. Walker, Jr. in collaboration with Daniel N. Matthews. **Nez Perce Coyote Tales: The Myth Cycle.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. Pp. x + 244, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$13.95 paper.

Tom Mould

The collection of Nez Perce Coyote tales that Deward E. Walker, Jr. and Daniel N. Matthews amass in this book—originally published in hard cover as *Blood of the Monster: The Nez Perce Coyote Cycle*—fits neatly within the tradition of such collections of Native American narrative where the text is the thing. Walker and Matthews are explicit about their focus: “This book was conceived primarily as a collection of stories rather than a study of the theoretical controversies surrounding how anthropologists interpret myth” (xi). Happily, the authors hold to this dictum only in the presentation of the texts themselves. Part Two of the book is a “Descriptive Interpretation of Coyote’s Character,” in which Walker and Matthews address many of the questions raised implicitly by the texts. In doing so, they provide a culturally specific picture of this trickster figure that challenges past assumptions of this slippery and complex character.

Walker and Matthews’s motivation for eschewing a scholastic presentation is partially an attempt to provide the Nez Perce people with texts in a form they would most appreciate. “We have been informed by the Nez Perce that there is virtue in the relative simplicity of our presentation, quite unlike the confusion they sometimes feel when reviewing other more theoretical presentations” (xii). However, Walker and Matthews truthfully acknowledge that they were not completely successful, noting that both tribal and academic colleagues have “tended not to favor our focus on only one character of the myths, the Coyote” (xii). The suggestion is that by isolating Coyote tales from the rest of Nez Perce myth, one risks misinterpretation of the tales themselves, not to mention Nez Perce mythology in general. Such a risk seems particularly evident when reading the tale “Killer Mosquito,” for example, in which Coyote is a minor character.

It is the picture of Coyote as a unique Nez Perce construction and unique trickster figure, rather than an amalgamation from various cultures, that is one of Walker and Matthews’s greatest accomplishments in this book. This is no small achievement. Although Paul Radin’s seminal book *The*

Trickster claimed to be such a cultural construction, Radin's tendency to move toward universal archetypes via Jung undercuts such an effort. But here we find a trickster figure among the Nez Perce that does not fit the mold Radin and others have constructed. Here we often see Coyote as a true leader, who at times acts solely out of concern for his people rather than out of personal desires of hunger, greed, or lust. For all his wandering and marginalized status, he is also seen as a member of a community. Nor is he unconscious of his actions and the social structure he is asked to operate within. We even see him in a subservient role within this structure. In "Bobcat and Pine Squirrel's Daughter," for example, the Chief calls to Coyote as an advisor and messenger. The relationship is not constructed (as many are) by Coyote as part of a scheme, but rather exists *a priori* of the plot. The assumption is that Coyote has been fulfilling this subservient, socially recognized, and accepted role before the story begins.

Walker and Matthews develop this culturally specific picture of Coyote by addressing not only the tales they have included in the book, but the extant versions they have found in the other books they mined for their collection. Further, by examining the entire corpus of Nez Perce Coyote stories, Walker and Matthews are able to explain plot developments in specific stories through comparison to others. This is possible because, by applying a structuralist approach to the corpus of Coyote tales, Walker and Matthews have found consistencies and patterns in a figure that has often frustrated scholars by appearing so random.

Any good book will inspire questions and areas for further research. This book certainly does. And many of the questions that it reserves for a later time are warranted—to address them fully would entail another book altogether (such as a lengthy comparison to the entire Nez Perce mythological world, and discussion of how myth relates to the Nez Perce today). Nonetheless, somewhat more substantial references to these questions could have been possible and would have been useful. Further, there are other concerns that should have been dealt with (and that could have been within the purview of the book)—for example, annotating the stories with basic situational and cultural context and providing a schema of Nez Perce myth cycles and how Coyote fits within it. The question of cycles, too, could perhaps have been explained. Why, for example, does a story that explicitly refers to the creation of the white-tailed deer as having already happened, *precede* the story of its creation? *Nez Perce Coyote Tales* does not answer all the questions the texts and the authors raise, but no book could. For what it claims to be, the book is ultimately a useful addition to the ever-growing collections of Native American narratives.